

Shakspeare, in another place, speaks of *spotless reputation* :

“The purest treasure mortal times afford
Is spotless reputation ; that away,
Men are but gilded loam or painted clay.”

Such, we presume, was the reputation of the Pharisees. To the world they were spotless, but to the searching eye of Divinity, odious and corrupt.

Such, then, is the difference between character and reputation. And it is the neglect and losing sight of this distinction, and the almost universal desire of gaining a name—of having our praises sounded by the multitude—of acquiring a reputation independent of, and if necessary by, the sacrifice of character that has been the curse, not only of the present, but all past ages. Like Aaron’s rod, it swallows up and is the parent stem of all other evils. It brings into play, calls into activity, and gives strength and vitality to all the baser passions of the soul, which tend to debase and degrade the man. It has been productive of more misery to the human race than all other causes combined. Through it countless thousands have been made

“Thro’ weary life this lesson learn
That man was made to mourn.”

By it, the base and wicked have been stimulated to action; before it the wise and good have fallen. It has destroyed cities, blotted out nations, effaced in man the image of his Creator. Eve plucked the forbidden fruit, not that she might become more holy; her act was the offspring of a vain desire to be reputed wise—an inordinate ambition to be accounted equal with God. There is such a thing as virtuous ambition, and a desire to excel in what is good, is commendable; but nothing is more destructive of virtuous principle than that inordinate ambition which is generated by, and is always attendant on the desire to fill the mouth of fame, not having a due regard to Character, or the “moral mark” which lies within the man himself. Burton describes it as a “dry thirst of honor,” “a great torture of the mind,” composed of “envy,” “pride,” and “covetousness,” a “canker of the soul,” an “hidden plague,” a “secret poison,” the “mother of hypocrisy,” “the moth of holiness,” corrupting all that it takes hold of. Seneca speaks of it as a “vain, windy, solicitous and fearful thing.” No age, nation, class, or society but what has felt its blighting, withering curse. The soul that feeds and lives on mere reputation, like Sysiphus rolling